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ABSTRACT

After acknowledging that a large segment of the population does not use libraries due to difficulties of one kind or another in visiting them, this paper argues that people with reading handicaps constitute an even larger number of non-users. Surveys of the use of Danish libraries are briefly reviewed, and 11 groups of people with "reading difficulties" are identified. Fourteen types of materials that are now available, or should be available, to library users are listed, and methods for adapting the contents of a book to the needs of the reading handicapped, particularly the mentally retarded, are described. Finally, a list of suggestions to help public libraries intensify their efforts in serving people with reading problems is presented. Several bottom-of-the-page sentences have been lost in the process of copying this document. (JD)

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The Handicapped in Reading and the Public Libraries

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The Handicapped in Reading and the Public Libraries. By Jes Peterson, Library Inspector, State Inspection of Public Libraries, Copenhagen.

By means of our outreach service to people who, for one reason or another, are prevented from visiting the libraries in person, we manage to reach many people who would otherwise not have been library-users. If we put all these people together - people in hospitals, prisons, homes for the elderly, etc. - we find that we actually reach a very considerable section of the population.

However, in every country, there is an even bigger section of the population that is not prevented from visiting the libraries in person, but that nevertheless does not go there: people with a reading handicap, who for this reason are unable to profit fully from a visit to the library or who think that a visit would not profit them because they connect the word library with reading.

I say above that this group is much bigger than the group that is prevented from visiting the library in person. Roughly speaking, I would equate people with a reading handicap, in the broadest sense of the word, with what is usually called the non-users. Of course, those who have reading difficulties because of physical and/or mental handicaps or because they suffer from dyslexia (also called "word-blind" in some countries do not amount to a very significant percentage, but if we add them to those who can be termed "unaccustomed to reading", we get very near to 45% of the population, which, in some countries with a highly developed library service, almost corresponds to the part of the adults who are non-users.

To support this assertion, I wish to refer to a large-scale survey on the use of libraries in my own country, recently completed by the Danish Institute for Social Research.

This survey shows that 48% of the adult population (16 years and upwards) used the public libraries at the time of the investigation, while 28% had previously visited a library, and 24% had never used one.

The survey also revealed that some of the persons interviewed read library books and listened to music which they borrowed from their families and others. The Social Research Institute has converted these figures and adjusted them as follows for adult use of libraries:

52% of the adult population (16 years and upwards) use the public libraries, 25% has previously visited a library, 23% has never used one.

The survey also shows that 37% of the 0-6 year olds and 76-79% of those between 7-15 years of age use the public libraries.

I believe that those who are unaccustomed to reading are non-users, not because they are illiterate, nor because they are unable to read easy literature, but because their reading ability is insufficiently developed for them to understand the subject matter of ordinary/usual printed matter. And most of the stocks of an ordinary public library can be termed "ordinary/usual printed matter". In other words, I reject the view that non-users are non-users because they do not want to be users or because they prefer radio, television, films, etc., to library media, or because they have other/better things to do. I object because of the well known fact that people want what they can't get (in this case the ability to read), because I believe, in fact, that the average citizen of today desperately needs the information and other services which today's libraries offer, and because it is a matter of prestige for most people to own or to be able to use books and other printed materials. We might call the latter the vanity factor. Quite simply, people stay away from the libraries because the libraries have nothing for them or because they think that this is the case, with the sad result that they are partly or completely unable to acquire the information, knowledge and artistic experience available to the part of the population that does not suffer from reading handicaps, through books and other printed materials.

In order to describe in more detail what I mean by the term

"reading difficulties", whether these are due to physical or mental handicaps or have other causes, I have tried to draw up a list of all the groups who, for some reason or other, are more or less handicapped in reading. It should be remembered that my interpretation of the term is a very wide one and also that different forms of reading handicaps may be very severe or very slight, and that there is a smooth transition to "ordinary" readers. I also know that any survey of handicapped readers will probably suffer from inaccuracies and that there will also be overlapping groups.

Any list must thus be both too comprehensive and too narrow. Too comprehensive because all the groups listed are definitely not primarily handicapped in reading, and too narrow because there may be readers with a handicap who are not covered by the groups or catagories listed.

Bearing these reservations in mind, the following list can only be called an attempt at systematizing the problem:

1) People with a reading and language retardation (in some countries, termed "dyslexia").
2) People with impaired vision (blind,deaf-blind, severe or slight impairment of vision).
3) People with a hearing handicap (including the "deaf").
4) Motorically handicapped people (unable to hold a book, turn pages, etc.).
5) The mentally retarded.
6) Aphasics.
7) People suffering from mental or physical ilness which makes it difficult for them to concentrate to a "normal degree", perhaps because of medication.
8) Elderly persons who lack the strength or energy to embark on a normal book.
10) Those "unaccustomed to reading" (see above).
11) Other groups, including the socially handicapped, educationally retarded people, and people with general learning difficulties.

It would be tempting to try to go into detail regarding the

the libraries. Unfortunately, this is not possible within the limits set by a paper of this kind.

However, there is one group - the dyslectics - on which I would like to add a few comments. In many cases, this reading handicap stems neither from a mental nor from a physical handicap/disablement, and it is very often unrelated to intelligence. Retarded readers - dyslectics, dysphasics - are also often described, at any rate in Denmark, as "slow readers". The main characteristic of the group is that its members find it difficult and, in some cases, impossible, to establish a functional reading and/or spelling ability.

Various factors may contribute to this handicap:

"Undeveloped or shaky domestic usage" is a very simplified characteristic of a good many factors belonging to the conditions in a person's home. At least it is possible to point to the general importance of the home background as regards usage, often at a very early stage of life. Other factors may be summarized under the term "insufficient education/training/school attendance", this term covers a lot of individual factors, besides which, the handicap itself may not have been sufficiently noticed and/or considered at school.

Other factors include "emotional attitudes" - more or less fundamental personal traits, which may inhibit the acquisition of reading ability, anxiety (angst), aversion, lack of initiative, etc. The general social background as well as social conditions on the whole can have a very serious effect.

Frequently, we find a condition which might be called "specific reading difficulties", often without any possibility of demonstrating or referring to any connection with the factors mentioned above. Sometimes, these"specific reading difficulties", are often combined with spelling difficulties, but they need not be. When people use the word "dyslectic" and similar, they often mean persons within this group.

The above-mentioned factors are often seen singly, independent

of each other, but they often give rise to, and/or are conditioned by each other, and they also occur concurrently.

In all cases, the effect is difficulties with regard to reading printed material.

It is therefore of the greatest importance that the libraries provide printed material that is adapted to the needs of people with a reading handicap - materials that are "tailored" to their needs.

Nevertheless, the libraries should not concentrate solely on adapted printed material. Printed material is only one means of acquiring information, knowledge and artistic experience. Equally important are the audio-visual media and these media combined with adapted, easily readable printed material. Through these media people who can only read with great difficulty or not at all may obtain completely or partly the same experience as those who can read without difficulty by means of books and other printed material.

It should be remembered that for some people, whose reading is severely retarded, the audio-visual media are the only means of acquiring information. In other words, the libraries must, to a far greater extent than hitherto, invest in these media as an alternative to printed material.

With regard to all these materials I am tempted to go into detail. But being forced to confine myself to a minimum I venture to make a list of the media in question.

I should also like to go into detail as regards the technical reading aids, which are so important when speaking about the motorically handicapped, but on this occasion I must confine myself to mentioning the term without going into further detail.

The materials that are now available to the users, or rather should be available, are the following. The list is not comprehensive but merely serves to illustrate the present state of affairs and points to fields where an intensified

1. The book
2. Periodicals, newspapers, other printed materials.
3. The talking book (as an alternative to the book)
4. Book and tape (or record etc., integrated/combined. The text of the book and the tape are not identical.)
5. Book + tape (the tape has a backing-up and supporting function. In this case the text of the book and the tape are identical, the text is recorded at a slow pace and put to use by means of a specific technique.)
6. Tape or records.
7. Visual projection (pictorial materials i.e. slides, transparencies etc.)
8. Tape-slide series/audio-film.
9. Microforms
10. Films/videotapes
11. Materials for teaching machines
12. Idea-forming materials.
13. Models/objects (concrete materials)
14. Tactile materials

Several of the above mentioned media are only found in the libraries in a few exeptional cases, which is regrettable, as many of them - if used in consideration to the individual needs - are just as relevant as books and other printed materials to people without reading difficulties. This fact should lead to the libraries giving greater attention to these materials in the future than hitherto. Various levels of elaboration are needed within each type of material.

In order to illustrate this I would like to mention some of the variations in which the content of a book can be made available to a number of user groups:

1. "An ordinary, common book" in which normal requirements of quality are met as regards language, appearance, print, layout, illustration, etc.
   User group: "The ordinary, common reader".
2. A specially adapted book, made easy to read.
   User group: retarded readers, slow readers and people whose reading handicap

these and other user groups, the demands as regards language and appearance are very individual and there is a need for various versions. This does not, however, mean that the book should not look like a book, and many of the special measures that should be taken for the above-mentioned groups would also be appreciated by the general reader.

3. A large-print book.
   User group: readers with impaired vision.
4. A Braille book.
   User group: The blind and people with severely impaired vision.
5. A talking book.
   User group: The blind and people with severely impaired vision. People who are unable to hold a book, turn the pages, etc. People, who owing to illness - perhaps only temporarily - are unable to read ordinary books. Retarded readers who want to absorb the content of a book unimpeded by their handicap. Some of the group previously termed "unaccustomed to reading".
6. Book + tape. In this case it is a condition that the book or other printed text is of such a nature that it is suitable for this media, i.e. it must be written with special reference to the user group or it must be a text which has been specially adapted in line with the author's intention and the original content of the book/text.
   User group: retarded readers and also some of the people listed under point 5.
7. Visual forms, i.e. film strips.
   User group: The deaf, etc.

We should bear in mind that for handicapped readers the demand for information and experience through the library is such that our goals must constantly be under revision. The existing market must be extended to include new materials of many kinds within all topics and at many levels, some of them for general use and others for lending through the library, and some, perhaps solely for use under the guidance of a teacher.

If we carried the matter to its logical conclusion we would look at the content of all printed materials, for instance, the wording of tickets and all other everyday printed matter. Every citizen is supposed to know the laws of his/hers country, and in many contexts we are expected to be able to read and understand what is said on posters, labels, notices, telephone directories, timetables, dictionaries etc. I think that is is the duty of librarians constantly to make the writers of all the above material aware that they should strive to write clearly and concisely in order that the message to be communicated reaches the people for whom it is intended.

Books for retarded readers

There are many factors to consider when producing books, especially for retarded readers. (As a matter of fact most of these demands should also be considered when talking about the production of books generally). And it is not only the authors who must consider these demands. Everybody involved must co-operate closely, editors, illustrators, everyone involved in the editorial process, including the technical staff, printers, compositors, etc. The process and the demands to be fulfilled concern, for instance, the cover of the book, the language and vocabulary, the names of the characters, the illustrations and layout, the quality of the paper and its color, the length of the lines, the line spacing as well as the distance between the single characters, the types employed and the color of the print, use of marks, etc.

Once again, it is not possible to go into detail regarding these demands, even though they are of great importance. The same reservation applies to the manifold demands to be considered in the production of all the other materials mentioned above, for example talking books, in order that they can satisfactorily supply the needs of handicapped readers.

Generally speaking, there is a great shortage of all the materials mentioned. The present production only supplies a small fraction of the demand and there is a long way to go before the libraries will be able to achieve the ideal, which is to present the individual user with the version or rendering most suitable for him/her. On the other hand, we should not despair. At least we can do our best to help to make the problem known to the public and our politicians, to authors and publishers, and within our own ranks. The part of the population we speak about is so big that it would pay the publishers to make an effort in this field. Even in a small country like Denmark it has been possible to publish many hundreds of books specially written and adapted for reading retarded children and young people with a reading disability and for publishers who have had the courage to enter into this venture it has proved a success.

On the whole, an intensified contribution on the part of the public library is urgently needed. This applies to:

a. General information about understanding of all problems relating to handicapped readers in co-operation with the press, radio and television authorities, etc.
b. Efforts to improve and extend the production of materials for handicapped readers.
c. Copyright problems in connection with the use of these materials.
d. Co-operation with reading consultants and reading teachers and the educational system. This is a field where librarians and teachers should work together.
e. Proper instruction in the problems of handicapped readers included in the training of librarians.
f. Lists and catalogues of media available to handicapped readers.
g. The methods of arranging and equipping our libraries. Great consideration should be given to the needs of handicapped readers.
h. And, last but not least, the way in which, on a local basis, in every single library, we organize an improved

All this must be done because the library authorities and we librarians are among those responsible for helping a large part of the population of our countries to function better both culturally and socially and thus to achieve a stronger sense of personal fulfilment.

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Attention is drawn to the fact that in the preparation of this paper I have made frequent use of the report "De læse-handicappede og bibliotekerne", ("The Handicapped in Reading and the Libraries"), published 1979 by the State Inspection of Public Libraries and the Ministry of Education, Copenhagen.

Jes Pedersen